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SUBJECT: SUNNIS IN HAWIJAH MAY PREFER POLITICIANS TO TRIBES

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CLASSIFIED BY: Michael Oreste, PRT Team Leader, REO Kirkuk, DoS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. The Sunni community in the Kirkuk province wanted to benefit from U.S. outreach efforts, but the U.S. needed to work with the right Sunni leaders. A Sunni Arab politician from Kirkuk argued that the people of Hawijah were fed up with the tribes' inability to deliver security to their area and were inclined now to support Iraq's political process. He argued that the coming provincial elections would legitimize Hawijah's city council leaders and undermine tribal and terrorist influence. He requested that the U.S. push the Iraqi Government to hold provincial elections as soon as possible. Sunni political party branches in the Kirkuk province were financially hamstrung by Baghdad's control of the funds. Iranian, Syrian, and Ba'athist entities may be encroaching on Kirkuk's oil fields. END SUMMARY.

Sunnis in Kirkuk Want to Benefit from U.S. Outreach

12. (C) Ahmad Hamed al-Ubaydi, head of the Iraqi Republican Gathering (IRG) office in Kirkuk, on April 2 told PRT chief and IPAQ that the Sunni community in the Kirkuk province wanted to benefit from U.S. outreach efforts, but the U.S. needed to work with the right Sunni leaders. PRT chief responded that he was ready to meet with Sunni leaders in Hawijah, but that Ubaydi needed to ensure security, adding that any incident would undermine his purpose in visiting Hawijah. Ubaydi promised that if he discussed the visit with the Hawijah city council beforehand, there would be no incident.

Hawijah Ready to Support the Political Process

13. (C) Ubaydi said the people of Hawijah believed that the MNF-I had identified terrorists in Hawijah, but had not arrested them in order to avoid a sectarian conflict. Ubaydi argued that the people of Hawijah were fed up with the tribes' inability to deliver security to the area and were more inclined now to support Iraq's political process. For example, when the MNF-I began circulating the idea that they might raid Hawijah, the residents there began to be more cooperative. Ubaydi said it was good that the MNF-I had shifted its support toward Hawijah's political leaders instead of the tribal shaykhs. He argued that the coming provincial elections would legitimize city council leaders and undermine tribal and terrorist influence. Ubaydi requested that the U.S. push the Iraqi Government to hold provincial elections as soon as possible.

Political Leaders More Reliable Than the Shaykhs

14. (C) When asked why the Hawijah people would be willing to support political leaders instead of the shaykhs, Ubaydi said the people were disillusioned by the tribes inability deliver on their needs. He said the tribes neither sustained an effective military nor received financial support. Ubaydi claimed that the tribes spent the people's money on themselves. The tribal leaders competed with one another and were focused on looking better than the next shaykh. When asked how the tribes received funding, Ubaydi said the tribes had benefited financially from a variety of sources, including the former regime, the Turks, and the Kurds.

15. (C) Continuing the comparison between Hawijah's political leaders and its shaykhs, Ubaydi argued that the city's politicians had been more responsible in using their funds for the benefit of the Hawijah people. The political leaders also understood better what the Coalition expected from them, being more reasonable liaison partners with MNF-I. Ubaydi asserted that the tribal leaders, if allowed, would divide Iraqis just as the tribes were divided. Tribal leaders sat in their homes and waited for others to come to them, while the political leaders wanted to go out and engage with the people.

Sunni Arab Parties Lacking Funds

16. (C) Ubaydi estimated that approximately seven or eight Arab political parties existed in Kirkuk. The parties received funding from their party headquarters in Baghdad. As a result, the parties were not free to spend their funds the way they wanted. Ubaydi said that if the party branches in Kirkuk were given more leeway on how to spend their funds, they could accomplish more. He complained that the other parties in Baghdad were spending too much on vehicle and residential

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expenses.

17. (C) Ubaydi said Sunni Arabs were limited in their efforts to solicit funds from external sources. He claimed Sunni parties could not contact the Turks because of the Kurds; and, they could not contact the Syrians or the Iranians because of the United States. Ubaydi said that Jordan was financially empty. He concluded the Arabs, therefore, had no other choice than to reach out to regional Arab states.

Iranians, Syrians, and Ba'athists Targeting Kirkuk?

18. (C) Ubaydi said there were two external forces encroaching on Kirkuk - the Iranians from the south and southwest; and a Syrian and Ba'athist alliance from the north. He claimed the Iranians sought to control all of Iraq's oil fields but had little influence currently in Kirkuk. Ubaydi said the Iranians were using proxy groups - SCIRI and the Sadrists - to gain influence in Kirkuk. He said SCIRI had failed the Iranians on the Kirkuk project, and now the Iranians were supporting the Sadrists to expand their influence in southern Kirkuk. Ubaydi said he thought the Sadrists were benefiting by expanding its JAM presence in northern Iraq. He added that Kirkuk was fertile ground for potential JAM recruits, due to the lack of political organization among young Shia Arabs.

Biographic Note

19. (SBU) Ubaydi is an ex-officer in the Ba'athist military. He was jailed and sentenced to execution following the 1991 Shia uprising in southern Iraq, because he refused to lead his subordinates to battle against fellow Iraqis. Ubaydi's wife - a Turkoman - is a retired accountant, and the two have a son and daughter in high school. Ubaydi does not own a vehicle and uses

the IRG's party vehicle to travel around. He claimed to work without a salary. Ubaydi also is financially responsible for his brother and his family, who lost their home. Ubaydi has a sister that works at Tikrit University and another sister on the Kirkuk Provincial Council. His four other sisters are teachers.

Comment

¶10. (C) Ubaydi has been an ongoing interlocutor with the Kirkuk Regional Embassy office on the pulse of the political process in Hawijah. Despite Ubaydi's anti-tribal stance, he probably maintains good tribal connections, being from one of the two largest Arab tribes in the Kirkuk province. We cannot validate his judgment that the Sunni Arabs in Kirkuk province are more supportive of political leaders than shaykhs, considering Ubaydi himself is a political leader. His fear of Iranian encroachment is a typical Sunni Arab position.
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